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FARS ARCHAEOLOGY PROJECT 2004: EXCAVATIONS AT TAL-E MALYAN

By John R. Alden, Kamyar Abdi, Ahmed Azadi, Gary Beckman, and Holly Pittman

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In 2004 the Fars Archaeology Project, a cooperative research effort between the Iranian Culture Heritage and Tourism Organization and Dartmouth College, carried out six weeks of excavation at Tal-e Malyan in the Kur River Basin of Fars Province, Iran.

Work at Malyan began on October 22 and concluded on November 26. During this period we excavated in three separate areas, designated G9/H9/I9, H1s, and YBR. G9/H9/I9 consisted of two adjacent 10 x 10 m. squares (grid squares H9 and I9) and one 5 x 10 m. square (the eastern half of square G9); H1s was a 3 x 2 m. sounding in the south-east corner of grid square H1, oriented E-W; and YBR was a 1 x 25 m. test trench oriented roughly N-S and given a non-grid three-letter designation. The locations of these excavations are shown in Fig. 1. H9 reached an average depth of about 1.5 m., I9 about 1.0 m., G9 about 1.1 m., H1s an average of 3.2 m., and YBR an average depth of about 1.2 m. In total, we excavated about 300 cubic m. of deposits during the 2004 season.

The aim of the G9/H9/I9 effort was to find architectural remains in the area immediately west of the 1976 and 1978 excavations in squares G5/H5/G7/H7 that would add to our understanding of the structures uncovered in those earlier excavations. Our intention was to excavate the first well-preserved level of architecture in the G9/H9/I9 area, which we expected to be GHI BL 2 (Sumner 1988), and collect large samples of the ceramics, animal bones, and other remains associated with that occupation.

The H1s sounding was designed to recover a stratified sample of pottery, bone, and carbonised plant remains from an area of Kaftari-era midden that was close to the 1978 deep sounding in grid square H5. We hoped that the results of our excavation would either confirm or reject the proposal by Miller and Sumner (2004: 87) that the transition from Banesh to Kaftari ceramics was gradual and more or less continuous rather than the sharply discontinuous break indicated by the stratigraphy of the ABC operation (Sumner 2003: 17; Miller and Sumner 2004: 77). The H1s sounding was

excavated in arbitrary 10 cm. levels, with material from one half of the sounding systematically screened and a float sample taken from the other half of the square in each of the excavated levels.

Finally, we put a 25 m. long trench across a line of qanat wells about 40 m. N of the 1972 excavation in square EE16. We chose this location after finding three fragments of baked brick with cuneiform inscriptions on their edges, like the inscribed brick published by Lambert (1972), in backdirt from several nearby qanat wells. We had also observed a very thick deposit of mud brick in another nearby well, this one collapsed, associated with an earlier qanat. This area of the site had been damaged by a clay-mining episode during the late 1990s, which had cut away more than half of the small mound tested in the EE16 operation (Abdi 2001: 79), and which had also exposed a large expanse of mud brick that we tentatively interpreted as a platform. (This led to our whimsical designation of the test trench as “YBR,” standing for “Yellow Brick Road”). We positioned the YBR trench so that it would, we hoped, intersect the edge of that great pile of mud brick. We were also hopeful that materials resting on top of, beneath, or against the face of the hypothetical platform would let us determine the age of that construction.

In terms of staff and effort, we devoted roughly equal times to the G9/H9/I9 and H1s areas, while the YBR trench got approximately a third of the time and energy that were spent on the two other areas. Measured by our initial objectives, the GHI excavation was unsuccessful, while the H1s sounding and the YBR trench met our expectations.

THE GHI AREA EXCAVATIONS

In G9/H9/I9, we found virtually no architecture. Our excavations indicated that all but the easternmost edge of this area had been dug away at some point after the construction of GHI Building Level 2 and had subsequently been filled with thick deposits of midden debris —

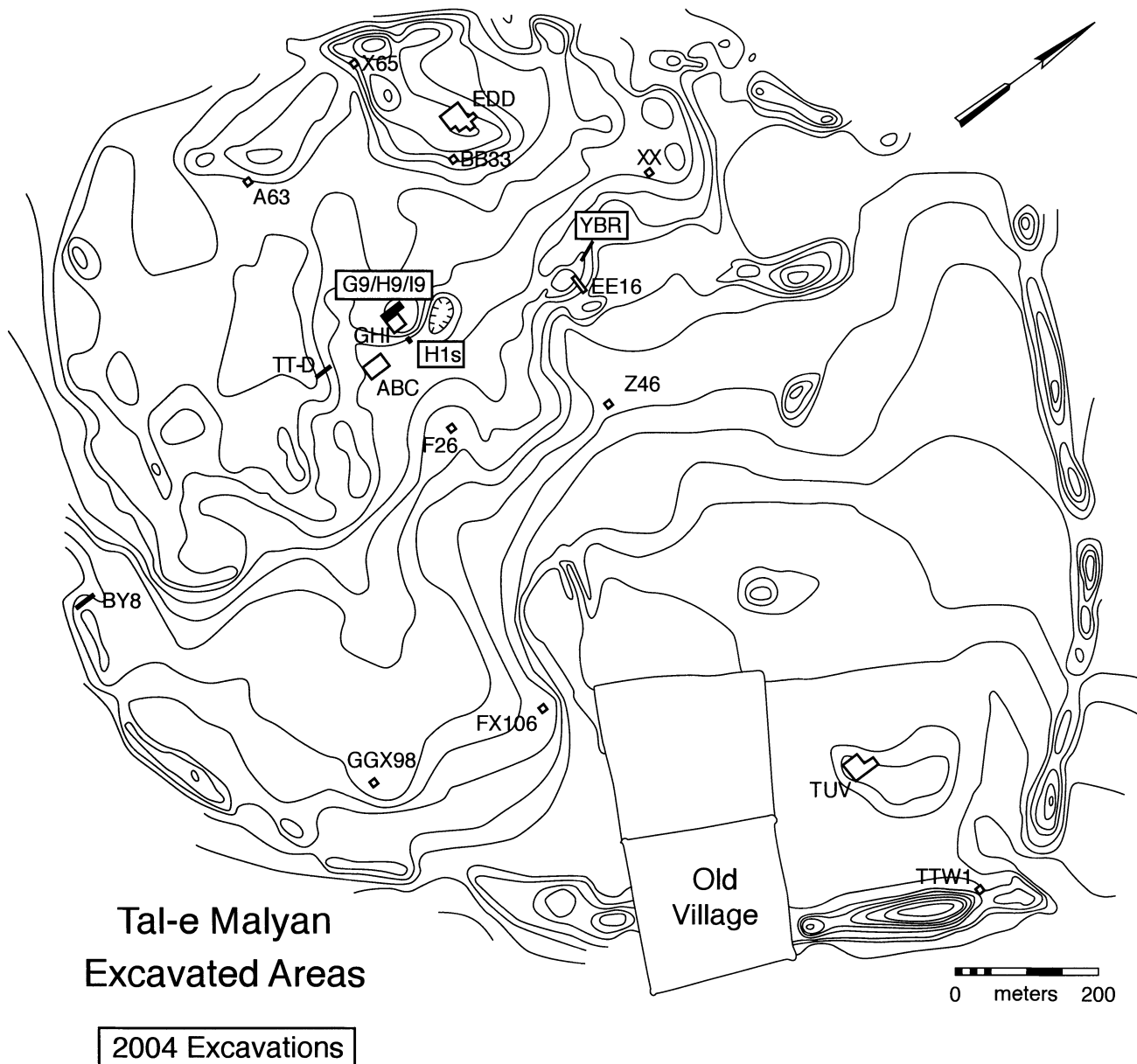


Fig. 1. Map of Malyan, showing locations of excavations at the site. The names of the 2004 excavations are put in boxes.

powdery yellow and black soil filled with fragments of mud brick, ceramics and animal bones. Typologically, the pottery in this midden appears to date to the Kaftari-Qaleh transition (1500–1300 B.C.) and, as we had hoped, we did indeed collect a considerable quantity of pottery and animal bone from those strata.

Unfortunately, the actual deposition of the G9/H9/I9 midden material seems to have occurred sometime after 1000 B.C., because we recovered a fragment of inscribed brick (M04-010, Fig. 2) from the midden fill

in square H9. Since this is a fragment similar to the one published by Lambert, commemorating the construction of a temple by Hutelutush-Inshushinak (who reigned somewhere between 1120 and 1090 B.C.), it is probable that the material in G9/H9/I9 was deposited some time after the reign of that monarch. Assuming that the brick was incorporated into the debris excavated in H9 at some point subsequent to the destruction of that temple, the deposition of the G9/H9/I9 midden would probably date to somewhere after 1000 B.C.



Fig. 2. Inscribed brick from Square H9, M04-010.

In sum, we cannot link the G9/H9/I9 midden deposits to any architectural remains and are limited to noting that, stratigraphically, those materials were deposited sometime after the end of the Building Level 2 occupation in grid squares G5/H5/G7/H7. In square G9 we did find a large area of the Kaftari street deposit that had been encountered by the excavators of square G7. The material of that feature consisted of multiple patchy or shallow strata of very hard-packed clay and it was full of pottery, bones, and small stones. The excavation of this deposit yielded a number of copper or bronze objects as well as quantities of finely painted Kaftari buff pottery.

Despite these stratigraphic problems, the G9/H9/I9 excavations did produce large samples of pottery from the Late Kaftari or Kaftari-Qaleh transitional periods. Because much of the material excavated from G5, G7,

and H7 in 1978 has been lost, the material recovered in 2004 will prove valuable in defining the ceramic assemblage in use at Malyan and in the Kur River Basin around the end of the second millennium B.C. The 2004 excavations also yielded large samples of animal bone and a number of small copper-bronze objects from that same era.

THE H1s SOUNDING

We positioned the H1s sounding so that it would be close to the 1978 sounding in H5 and in the area of Kaftari trash, but also in a location where it would avoid the backdirt and slope wash deposits deriving from the Tavalloli and GHI excavations. The goals of this excavation were to recover more materials from the

period of the Banesh-Kaftari transition (Miller and Sumner 2004) while also revealing more about the extent of the Banesh occupation evidenced in the ABC sounding. We also hoped that the archaeological deposits in this area would yield good samples of bone and carbonised plant remains from that poorly-known era. Poorya Kadish, a student from Tehran University's Masters program in Archaeology, and Will Reynolds, a recent graduate from Dartmouth, were put in charge of the H1s excavation and given responsibility for analysing the botanical and zoological remains from H1s.

The sounding produced very good samples of bone and good samples of pottery (which will be described and reported by Alden in a subsequent volume of this journal). The light fractions recovered in the flotation programme do not seem, on brief visual examination, to include many actual seeds, but they do contain many fragments of carbonised wood. Following the approaches developed by Miller and Zeder (Miller 1982; Zeder 1991) in previous work at Malyan, we expect that the botanical and zoological materials from H1s will reveal more about the region's premodern environment and about cultural exploitation of the regional landscape during the mid-third millennium B.C. We also hope that a column of soil samples collected from the south side of the sounding at the end of the excavation will add additional details to our understanding of the regional environment during the time of the Banesh/Kaftari transition.

From a preliminary examination of the ceramics, it is already clear that the H1s sounding confirms the suggestion of Miller and Sumner that the transition from Late Banesh to Kaftari is more accurately described as gradual and continuous rather than abrupt and discontinuous. The material from the top levels in the H1s sounding has much more Kaftari Painted Buff ware than Red-Slipped ware, while the lowest levels in the sounding contain virtually no Painted Buff ware and higher proportions of Red Slipped wares. This confirms a pattern observed by Nickerson in his study of Kaftari-period deposits at Malyan (Nickerson 1983: 194–99), although our typological ceramic categories — Kaftari Painted Buff and Red-Slipped — are more narrowly defined than the Kaftari Buff and Kaftari Red categories utilised by Nickerson. In addition, because we reached strata with no Kaftari Painted Buff material, it would appear that the deposits in the lowermost levels of H1s are significantly earlier than the date of 2200 B.C. that Nickerson assigns to the earliest Kaftari deposits examined in his analysis.

Three other important features of the H1s ceramics should be mentioned. First, the presence of carinated forms and the styles of decoration observed in the ceramics from the bottom of the H1s sounding both recall elements of the Banesh ceramic assemblage. Second, a large storage jar of Banesh Grit-Tempered ware was found, broken but *in situ*, in the bottom of the sounding. Finally, it must be noted that we did not encounter strata containing Late Banesh painted wares in the H1s sounding. The H1s sounding does not, therefore, provide evidence of an unbroken stratigraphic and stylistic transition from Banesh to Kaftari ceramics. It does, however, fill in much of the gap between the two periods that is shown in the chronological reconstructions of Miroshedji (2003: 20) and Voigt and Dyson (1992: 126).

The H1s sequence, combined with accumulating evidence for a significant Late Banesh occupation at Malyan (see YBR, below), implies two things. First, it now seems that both Malyan and the Kur River Basin were more or less continuously occupied during the third millennium B.C. — there was no major hiatus in occupation between the Banesh (3200–2700 B.C.) and Kaftari (2200–1500 B.C.) periods. Second, it indicates that there is a considerable degree of continuity, at least in the Kur River Basin, from the proto-Elamite society of the Banesh Period to the historically known Elamite era. This is evidence, of the sort that has heretofore been missing (cf. Potts 1999: 79), that proto-Elamite society may indeed have been ancestral to that of the historically known Elamites.

THE YBR TRENCH AND QANAT CLEANING OPERATION

The YBR sounding produced equally interesting results. In that area, we uncovered a 12 m. stretch of mud brick that appears, from its extent and the irregular pattern of bricklaying, to be the remains of a very large mud brick platform. We were not able to distinguish a clear face for the platform, but we did identify where the brickwork ended, and we were able to establish that, at that point, the platform had been over 1.5 m. thick. At another point some 20 m. or so to the south-east, we cleaned the face of a collapsed qanat well and found a deposit of solid mudbricks some 5 m. from top to bottom. Together, these results indicate that there was a very large mud brick platform in this part of the site.

At the moment, we are not able to specify the date of this construction. It is built of square mud bricks that are between 31 x 31 and 36 x 36 cm. in size (most of the bricks appear to be close to 33 x 33 cm), and those brick sizes are consistent with Kaftari-era construction. (Banesh bricks are typically rectangular and considerably smaller.) However, the material piled against the edge of the platform produced an unmixed sample of Late Banesh pottery, and in both areas that we tested, the material underneath the platform contains unmixed Middle to Late Banesh ceramics. Finally, within the mud brick making up the body of the platform there were a small number of baked bricks that, in size and shape, are very similar to the Lambert brick inscribed with a temple dedication by Hutelutush-Inshushinak. The presence of bricks from that era would indicate that the platform was built after the end of the Middle Elamite Period. To resolve, at least in part, questions about the age of the YBR platform, we collected two fragments of baked brick from within the platform that we hope to submit for thermoluminescence dating.

The YBR material includes plans and sections of the mud brick platform and a good sample of Late Banesh pottery; this material will be analysed and published by Abdi in a subsequent volume of this journal. At this point, we can say that the YBR excavations provide evidence for an area of Late Banesh occupation in the central area of Malyan, and that the mud brick platform represents a substantial construction in the same area either during or at some time subsequent to that Late Banesh occupation.

SURFACE FINDS

During the course of the 2004 season, we collected or were given several interesting surface finds — five fragments of inscribed brick and four small finds: a ceramic cylinder seal, a mould fragment, a carnelian stamp seal and a ceramic snake head vessel handle. Because these objects do not come from excavated contexts, we have chosen to publish descriptions, illustrations, and brief commentaries on these items here.

Inscribed Bricks

In 2004 we recovered six fragments of inscribed baked brick at Malyan. Five of these came from the surface of the site and one came from excavation square H9. The

fragments are all examples of the previously published Hutelutush-Inshushinak temple dedication inscription (Lambert 1972), which is written in Elamite and refers to a temple of baked brick built at Anshan. These fragments are described individually below.

In examining photographs of these fragments, Beckman noted only three or four places where different signs were used than on the Lambert brick. He found more frequent divergences, however, in the way the signs appeared on successive lines. Actual transliterations of the signs on each fragment will be published at a later time; at this point it is sufficient to note that all of these pieces of brick contain fragments of a single dedicatory inscription.

It may perhaps be significant that there are two types of inscribed brick among our finds. In one type the interior of the body is significantly thinner than the inscribed face, while in the second type the thickness of the face and body are nearly identical. Items M04-001, M04-013, and M04-024 are examples of the thin-body type, while items M04-011 and M04-012 are the thick-body type. Data for M04-010 are not recorded because there was not enough of the brick preserved to allow an accurate measurement of the interior body thickness.

TABLE 1. Inscribed brick fragments from Malyan, 2004.

Find #	Object #	Find Location	Description
mf 11299	M04-001	surface	corner brick, inscribed on 2 faces
mf 11397	M04-010	H9, Lot 4	well-preserved inscription
mf 11398	M04-011	surface	small fragment, found with M04-001
mf 11399	M04-012	surface	100 m. N, 40 m. E of grid C/C1/D/D1
mf 11400	M04-013	surface	found by visitor, location uncertain
mf 11539	M04-024	surface	5 m. W of YBR on N edge of qanat well

M04-001 — Inscribed Brick

Fired brick, Munsell 10YR 7/4, inscribed with cuneiform text on two adjacent (corner) finished faces. L. 11.0 cm., W. 10.3 cm., T. 6.0 cm. on face, 4.7 cm. in centre of body. The inscription consists of seven partial lines of text along both the longer and the shorter sides



Fig. 3. Snakehead handle from large jar or basin, M04-025.

of the brick, a format identical to that of the Lambert brick. This brick fragment was found with fragment M04-011 in backdirt from the relatively recent excavation of a qanat well approximately 40 m. north of the north-west corner of Operation EE 16. The brick was cleaned by immersion in dilute hydrochloric acid (HCl) for two hours to remove a heavy lime encrustation; it was then rinsed for two hours in village tap water, re-rinsed in fresh water for an additional hour, and then cleaned gently with a toothbrush. The inscription contains parts of lines 25 to 32 (on the first face) and 35 to 40 (on the second face) of the transcription published by Lambert (1972: 64–65).

M04-010 — Inscribed Brick (Fig. 2)

Fired brick, Munsell 10YR 8/3, inscribed with seven complete and three partial lines of cuneiform text on the brick's only finished face. L. 10.3 cm., W. 6.7 cm., T. 6.0 cm. on face. Found in excavation (in Lot 4 of Operation H9), the inscription on this brick is unusually well preserved. The brick was cleaned with M04-001, as

described above, and includes lines 35 to 43 of the Lambert transcription.

M04-011 — Inscribed Brick

Fired brick, Munsell 10YR 7/3, inscribed with one complete and six partial lines of cuneiform text on the brick's only finished face. L. 8.3 cm., W. 6.3 cm., T. 6.4 cm. on face and 6.5 cm. in body of brick. The brick was found on the surface within a few metres of M04-001. The inscription is well preserved but somewhat worn, and this brick was also cleaned as described for M04-001. It includes parts of lines 58–66 of the Lambert brick's transcription]

M04-012 — Inscribed Brick

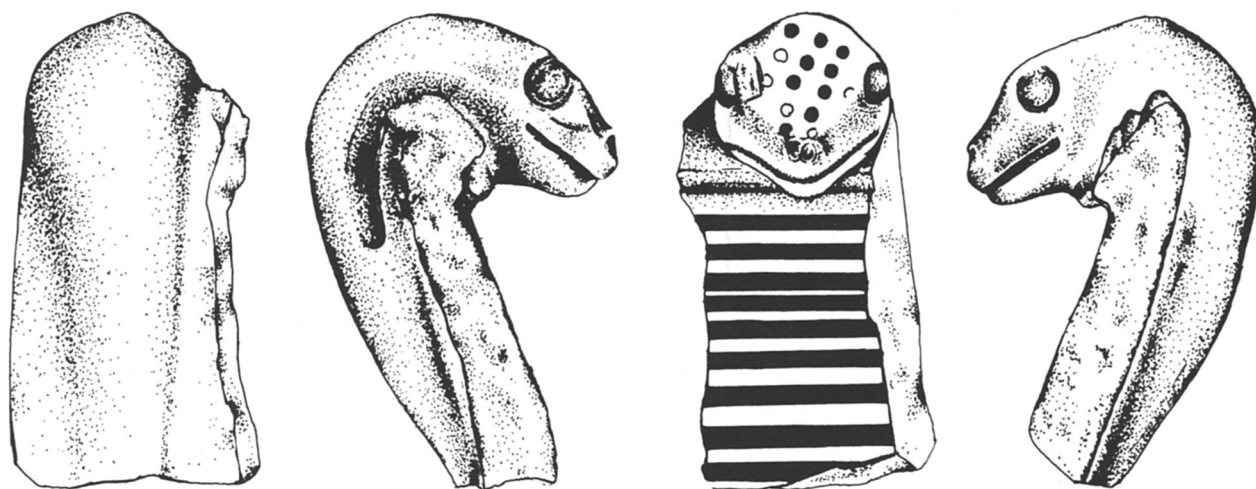
Fired brick, Munsell 10YR 7/4, inscribed with seven complete and five partial lines of cuneiform text on the brick's only finished face. L. 13.3 cm., W. 10.0 cm., T. 6.9 cm. on face and 7.2 cm. in body of brick. The brick was found on the surface by one of our workmen, approximately 100 m. north and 40 m. east of grid point C/C1, D/D1. The inscription is well preserved but somewhat worn, and this brick was cleaned as described previously. The inscription on this brick is in the line 18–28 range of the Lambert transcription.

M04-013 — Inscribed Brick

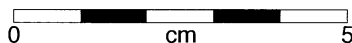
Fired brick, Munsell 7.5YR 6/4, inscribed with nine partial lines of cuneiform text on one of the brick's two finished faces. The first lines of the inscription, however, are missing. L. 9.6 cm., W. 9.8 cm., T. 6.8 cm. on face and 4.8 cm. in body of brick. This brick was given to us by a visitor from the village, and its find spot is unknown. The inscription is well preserved, and this brick was cleaned with M04-001, as described above; it includes parts of lines 2 to 14 of the Lambert transcription.

M04-024 — Inscribed Brick

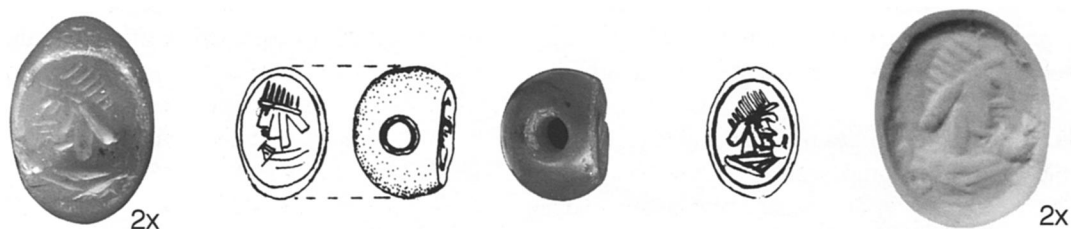
Fired brick, light reddish brown to light brown in colour, inscribed with seven very fragmentary lines of well-preserved cuneiform text on the brick's only finished face. L. 12.5 cm., W. 11.1 cm., T. 5.9 cm. on face and 5.0 cm. in the body of the brick. The brick was found in qanat backdirt on the north side of a qanat hole roughly 5 m. west of the YBR trench. It was cleaned in dilute hydrochloric acid for between five and ten minutes, which worked as well as the longer immersion used with earlier brick finds. The relationship between the text of this brick and the Lambert transcription is uncertain.



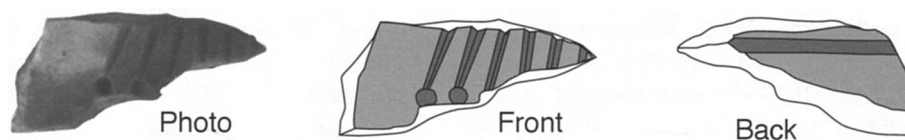
4a. M04-025 - Modeled Snake Head Ceramic Vessel Handle



4b. M04-002 - Ceramic Cylinder Seal and Impression



4c. M04-022 - Carnelian Stamp Seal (left) and Impression (right)



4d. M04-018 - Mould Fragment

Fig. 4. Small finds from surface of site, 2004.

*Small Finds***M04-002 — Cylinder Seal (Fig. 4)**

Ceramic cylinder seal, complete. This seal, Munsell 7.5YR 7/2, is 2.9 cm. long and slightly barrel-shaped, with a diameter of 1.4 cm. at its middle and 1.1 cm. at the ends. It is decorated with the deeply incised figures of what appear to be a man and an ibex, both underlined, and separated by two enigmatic shapes and seven deep punctations; a solid line is incised around the bottom of the seal. This object was found in eroding brickwork in the middle of the old Fereidoun Tavalloli excavation approximately 12 m. north of the north edge of Operation H7. It is pierced with a small hole approximately 0.18 cm. in diameter that is a millimetre or two off-centre.

M04-018 — Fragment of Metal Casting Mould (Fig. 4)

Small fragment, with all sides broken away, of what appears to be a ceramic mould for casting fine metal pins. The object is 13.4 mm. thick at its thickest point, and 11.0 mm. thick at its narrowest end, and is 31 mm. long and 16 mm. wide. The ceramic itself is pale buff with no visible temper with a few small vacuoles scattered through the paste. Most of the fragment, however, is burned black, including all of the areas with grooves. Both the front and back of the object are grooved; there is a single long line on the back, and six lines spreading radially on the front. Two of those lines end in deeper impressed circular pits. The impressed lines on the front are about a millimetre wide, slightly less than a millimetre deep, and triangular in cross-section; the line on the back is slightly over two mm. wide at the top, one mm. deep, and about 1.5 mm. wide at the bottom, and it is trapezoidal in cross section.

M04-022 — Carnelian Stamp Seal (Fig. 4)

This nicely-carved stamp seal appears to have been made by cutting a facet off one side of a large carnelian sphere, and then engraving the seal image into the resulting flat surface. Before the facet was removed, the stone was roughly spherical and 19.6 mm. in diameter. The hole drilled in the seal is 0.5 mm. in diameter, and because the hole is centered on the faceted stone rather than on the spherical stone, it seems likely that the stone was pierced after being faceted rather than before. The seal is 13.1 mm. thick and 15.0 mm. wide at the carved face and the flat face of the seal is an oval 15 x 12 mm. in size. The intaglio carving shows the head of a man in profile; the man appears to be wearing a head-dress with

a cloth headband, and both the carving and costume are Sassanian in style.

M04-025 — Ceramic Snake Head Bowl or Basin Handle (Figs. 3 and 4)

This elegantly modelled snake, given to us by one of the Malyan villagers, is said to have come from the surface of the site. The object is reddish buff in colour and finely shaped; the surface of the vessel portion is marked by fine chaff inclusions, but the surface of the snake is smooth. After the snake was cleaned in dilute hydrochloric acid for between five and ten minutes, a number of black dots became visible on the top of the snake's head and a series of carefully painted parallel lines became visible on the exterior of the vessel body just below the vessel's rim. The paste of this object includes visible grit temper, and it is denser, more tightly knit, and perhaps more highly fired than typical Kaftari Painted Buff ware vessels. All these characteristics are similar to published descriptions of Qaleh Ware, and those similarities are reinforced by the regular, evenly spaced painted lines circling the rim of the vessel that this snake decorates. But larger Kaftari Buff Ware vessels tend to have denser and harder pastes than the small Kaftari pots, and the vessel that this snake decorated was fairly large. The thin colour of the paint is also more typical of Kaftari Painted Buff than of Qaleh. All in all, the technical characteristics of the ceramic from which the snake vessel was made are more similar to Kaftari Painted Buff than to any other local ware. Although the naturalistic style of the snake is reminiscent of Banesh modelled ceramics and the ceramic itself shows similarities with Qaleh Ware, this object would appear to be Kaftari in date rather than Qaleh.

CONCLUSIONS

In addition to the results of our excavations, we achieved several other goals during the 2004 season. Most importantly, through the generous assistance of the Iranian Cultural Heritage and Tourism Organization (ICHTO), we were able to begin work at the site. During our time in the field, the Fars division of ICHTO was very helpful and supportive of our work, and they were able to purchase a parcel of land behind the old (and now mostly abandoned) village of Malyan where we hope to build a permanent dig house and small site museum. Their support is wonderfully encouraging.

Second, we were able to include a large number of Iranian archaeologists and archaeology students in our work at the site. They were diligent, capable and enthusiastic participants in the research we were engaged in, and it was a pleasure to be able to work with them. We expect to continue such collaborative efforts in future seasons. All in all, we hope that the 2004 excavations will mark the beginning of a second phase of intensive archaeological investigation at this important site.

Acknowledgments

The Fars Archaeology Project carried out the excavations at Tal-e Malyan under a joint agreement of understanding between the Iranian Cultural Heritage and Tourism Organisation and Dartmouth College. We received financial and organisational support for the excavation from the National Geographic Society, Dartmouth College, and ICHTO, and are particularly grateful to Seyyed Mohammad Beheshti, former Director of ICHTO, Jalil Golshan, ICHTO Deputy for Research, and Dr. Masoud Azarnoush, Director of ICHTO's Centre for Archaeological Research, for the support they offered us in the course of this project. The ICHTO-Shiraz office assisted us immeasurably during the time we were in the field, in ways both tangible and intangible; and we are particularly grateful for the unstinting support offered by Mr. Qaedian, the Director, by Mr. Amiri, Deputy for Research, and by Mr. Khaloei, the project's representative from ICHTO-Shiraz. The drawings in Fig. 4 were made by Ms. Pari Abdollahi, an archaeology student at Marv Dasht University and artist in the Shiraz office of ICHTO, and Mohsen Ghaseme, an archaeology student at the University of Abhar, took the photographs in Figs. 2–4.

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